

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-02 INR-07 L-03

NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06

COME-00 EB-07 LAB-04 SIL-01 /069 W

----- 129392

R 161318Z SEP 75

FM AMEMBASSY KUWAIT

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3675

INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN

AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

AMEMBASSY JIDDA

AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PFOR PORS ASEC US KU EG IS

SUBJECT: INEFFECTIVENESS OF CALL FOR WORKERS STRIKE AND
CANCELLATION OF DEMONSTRATIONS IN PROTEST OF
SINAI ACCORD KUWAIT.

REF: KUWAIT 3720

1. FOR VARIETY OF REASONS, SOME OF WHICH TELL US
SOMETHING ABOUT
GOVERNMENT OF KUWAIT'S (GOK) ACTUAL POLITICAL
STANCE REGARDING SINAI AGREEMENT, DEMONSTRATIONS WHICH WERE
PLANNED TO BE HELD SEPTEMBER 15 WERE CALLED OFF. WORKERS'
STRIKE WHICH WAS TO ACCOMPANY THEM WAS REDUCED TO VOLUNTARY
CLOSING OF SOME COMMERCIAL ESTABLISHMENTS AND TO WORK NON-
ATTENDANCE BY MANY OF THE PALESTINIANS EMPLOYED IN KUWAIT.

2. IT IS NOT CLEAR WHETHER ORGANIZERS EVER GOT AROUND TO
PETITIONING MINISTRY OF INTERIOR FOR PERMISSION TO HOLD
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DEMONSTRATIONS, SINCE THERE WERE APPARENTLY DISAGREEMENTS

AMONG PARTICIPATING ELEMENTS AS TO WHETHER DEMONSTRATIONS, IF HELD, WERE LIKELY TO TURN OUT THE WAY THEY WANTED THEM. IN ALL LIKELIHOOD, IDEA FOR DEMONSTRATIONS DIED NATURAL DEATH DUE TO DIVISIONS WITHIN THE PLANNERS ABOUT THREE DAYS AGO. PALESTINIANS AND KUWAITI POLITICAL AND POPULAR ORGANIZATIONS DID, HOWEVER, UNITE IN CALL FOR GENERAL STRIKE YESTERDAY IN PROTEST AGAINST SINAI AGREEMENT. ANNOUNCEMENTS HAD BEEN DISTRIBUTED TO VARIOUS LABOR, STUDENT, WRITERS, TEACHERS AND OTHER POPULAR ORGANIZATION MEMBERS URGING THEM TO REFUSE TO GO TO WORK. THE CALL INCLUDED GOVERNMENT AS WELL AS PETROCHEMICAL WORKERS' UNIONS.

3. THIS STEP WAS MET WITH UNEXPECTEDLY FIRM GOVERNMENT REACTION. GOVERNMENT SPOKESMAN AND MINISTER OF STATE ABD-AL-AZIZ HUSSEIN ANNOUNCED THAT GOVERNMENT DISAPPROVED OF GENERAL STRIKES AND THAT NO GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEE WOULD BE EXCUSED FROM WORK TO PARTICIPATE IN ONE SCHEDULED FOR SEPTEMBER 15. MINISTER OF INTERIOR SHAYKH SA'D ALSO MADE SOME TOUG Y TATEMENTS INDICATING THAT QUICK ARREST WAS IN STORE FOR ANYONE PARTICIPATING IN DEMONSTRATIONS OR CAUGHT PRESSURING BUSINESSMEN TO CLOSE THEIR ESTABLISHMENTS. WE UNDERSTAND THAT THESE STATEMENTS LED PALESTINIAN AND KUWAITI ORGANIZERS OF THE STRIKE TO MEET WELL INTO THE NIGHT SEPTEMBER 14 TO REVIEW ALTERNATIVES OPEN TO THEM IN VIEW OF GOVERNMENT FIRMNESS. IN ONE MAJOR DEVELOPMENT, REPRESENTATIVES OF KUWAITI LABOR ORGANIZATIONS, INCLUDING THE PETROCHEMICAL WORKERS, REPORTEDLY WITHDREW THEIR SUPPORT FROM STRIKE IDEA, CLAIMING THAT ISSUE HAD BECOME TOO POLITICIZED AND WAS NO LONGER AN APPROPRIATE ONE TO BE MET BY TRADE UNIONISM METHODS.

4. AS IT TURNED OUT, THERE WERE SIGNIFICANT NUMBERS OF CLOSURES OF SMALL SHOPS FOR THE STRIKE, AND SOME LARGE PRIVATE FIRMS OPENED WITH ONLY SKELETON STAFFS. ALL GOVERNMENT OFFICES FUNCTIONED. POLICE PROTECTION AT U.S. AND EGYPTIAN EMBASSIES WAS INCREASED DRAMATICALLY AND VERY OBVIOUSLY, BUT NO INCIDENTS OCCURRED. THE SURPRISINGLY FIRM GOK POSITION APPARENTLY TOOK THE STEAM OUT OF EFFORTS TO PORTRAY REACTION TO THE SINAI ACCORD IN TERMS OF WIDESPREAD, HOSTILE OPPOSITION. STOLTZFUS

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: PUBLIC DEMONSTRATIONS, LABOR STRIKES, MILITARY AGREEMENTS, GOVERNMENT REACTIONS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 16 SEP 1975
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: greeneet
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1975KUWAIT03802
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: N/A
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D750321-0616
From: KUWAIT
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1975/newtext/t19750945/aaaabnkk.tel
Line Count: 99
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION NEA
Original Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 2
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 75 KUWAIT 3720
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: greeneet
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 30 JUL 2003
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <30 JUL 2003 by ShawDG>; APPROVED <28 NOV 2003 by greeneet>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
06 JUL 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: INEFFECTIVENESS OF CALL FOR WORKERS STRIKE AND CANCELLATION OF DEMONSTRATIONS IN PROTEST OF
TAGS: PFOR, PORS, ASEC, US, KU, EG, IS
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 06 JUL 2006